





BUT

UNDERNEATH I THINK WE ARE NOW IN A VERY EXCITING MELTING POT. THE RE-INVENTION OF MANNERIST STYLE AND THE HISTORICITY OF CINEMA IN PETER GREENAWAY'S ARTWORK

by
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The article summarises some key points of my dissertation thesis on history and figure-based narration in Peter Greenaway's artwork, which was published in German in 2012 (In Figuren erzählen, Bielefeld: transcript). Initially, my occupation with Peter Greenaway began with some amazement, since he was constantly re-utilising a distinct character in several films and projects over a period of almost thirty years. My astonishment even grew with the fact that Greenaway was always emphasising the artificiality of that figure; its literal and metaphorical quality that didn't comply with the regular uses of psychologically drawn characters in film and literature. Consequently, and according to my profession, I wanted to capture Greenaway's use of that figure, named Tulse Luper, as a more theatrical strategy: a mask (or even *larva*) of an storyteller that is situated within the communicative space between the cinematic screen and the observer. Thus, I had to look for historical models of figure-based storytelling, and even more for the medial disposition of cinema, to get some insight into Tulse Luper's particularity. As a result, there are some indications that Greenaway not only uses theatrical forms for telling his stories, but that his storytelling works as a reminder of forgotten (or more exactly, marginalised) modes of communication. By mannerist means and in baroque imagery, his filmic projects establish an open space of history telling and world representation that does affect the observer cognitively as well as emotionally. By that, Greenaway, although he himself likes to describe 'the cinema' at the beginning of the 21st century as a 'dying dinosaur,' gives back or re-ascribes a relevance to the cinematic disposition for reflecting on (the) present times. That particular interest for artistic ways of representing the present, post-modern world in its images of history, cultural order and identity is still one of the driving forces in my scientific research. Since I am looking for modes of narration and remembering, of representing and communicating a current 'world knowledge' as well as for phenomena of reverberation and re-enactment in the arts, theatre and film, my key interest would be best entitled 'artistic

historiography.' By that, I would describe not only some references in the arts to historical events, but, rather, an ethical occupation of both artists and historians with subjects as the construction of the past and its relevance for our contemporary times. Currently, my research focuses on some actors in Eastern European fine arts of the (Post-)Communist era, but also the most recent developments in film, theatre and literature are on my agenda. Largely I concentrate on media-transcending projects like music and dance theatre as well as multi-media projects (e.g. by Peter Greenaway) and interrelationships between performing and visual arts.

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Abstract

Within his cinematic works, British filmmaker, painter, curator, and multi-media artist Peter Greenaway proves techniques of discontinuous narration and playfully tries to retrieve forms of representation and perception that already seemed to be marginalised in the modern era. Those techniques are argued to have the potential to examine recent representations of cultural order and the historicity of the present. The paper is focusing on two peculiarities in Greenaway’s work that make the historicity of cinema evident: first, his commitment to a mannerist aesthetic, which he disjunctively connects to epistemological questions of the present, and, second, the examination of the cinema situation itself, which he calls a ‘dying dinosaur’ – a relic of modernity that needs a revolutionary reconditioning. In giving insights into two major works in which the very special companion and intermediary figure Tulse Luper makes his appearance, Greenaway’s strategies of historicising cinema will be addressed. This figure is to be characterised as a key element in establishing a space of encyclopaedic history-telling and discontinuous perception that outreaches the capacities of classic filmic representation.

Keywords: Peter Greenaway, Historicity, Mannerism, Cinematic Perception, Tulse Luper

Introduction

Some discontinuities and asynchronisms, moments of interruption and dislocation, are the initial point for a reconsidering of Peter Greenaway’s artwork. The British filmmaker, painter, curator, and multi-media artist intends throughout his works to analyse and recondition forms of filmic representation and observation. Focussing on the references and connections of two levels of perception, this paper takes a new glance at Greenaway’s occupation with this model of modern storytelling and imagining order: first, his conspicuous commitment to multiple mannerisms and figures of style that seem to be borrowed from a baroque aesthetic and build up an artistic strategy for coping with epistemological questions of the present and, second, the examination of the viewer’s situation within the cinematic disposition, which he wants to put under a revolutionary reconditioning. The following will provide some cues about Greenaway’s irregular and fragmented way of storytelling in two major works – the discontinuous ‘biographic anthology’ THE FALLS (1980) and the multi-perspective long-term project THE TULSE LUPER SUITCASES (2003ff). In conclusion, it will be revealed how Greenawayean cinema can be perceived as a medium of a contemporary historiography¹.

Discontinuous Storytelling: THE FALLS (1980)

I want to make films that rationally represent all the world in one place. That mocks human effort because you cannot do that. But the works of art that I admire [...] has that ability to put all the world together. My movies are sections of this world encyclopedia [...]. I demand, as we all do, some sense of coherence, of order in the world. And we are always defeated. This is the human condition. (Greenaway in Pally, 2000:107)

THE FALLS comes up as Greenaway’s first feature-length film, though not quite a film for the cinema. Like most of his short films before – probably best known: VERTICAL FEATURES REMAKE (1978) – it claims to be an academic (i.e. tedious) documentation. In the end, however, it proves to be an 185-minute-experiment on ways of storytelling, montage, and structuring image, sound, and symbolic references that happened to be a first hit with audiences beyond regular festival screenings. The opening sequence elucidates the emergence of the following plot: the Commission for the Investigation and Documentation of the unforeseen Violent Unknown Event (=VUE) that hit Europe and other parts of the world regularly releases biographic documentations on selected victims of that event.

The ninety-two people represented in this film all have names that begin with the letters FALL. The names are taken from the latest edition of the [Standard] Directory published every three years by the Committee investigating the Violent Unknown Event [...]. The names [...] represent a reasonable cross-section of the nineteen million other names that are contained there. (Greenaway 1980: prologue)

The VUE had a remarkable impact on its victims. Their anatomy was affected in different manners like compression of viscera, loss of weight, and bettering of sight as well as an enlargement and strengthening of arm, chest and breast muscles. In addition, they were struck by ninety-two completely unknown languages as well as a marked preference for singing. Last but not least, they divided into four sexes and became sterile, but did not age and so became immortal. As an excerpt from the larger Standard Directory and styled like a systematic, indexed and cross-referenced catalogue of all the aggrieved, THE FALLS promises a neutral mapping of the entire knowledge concerning the VUE. The ninety-two biographies cover everything between nine seconds and five minutes in length. Depending on the available amount of information, the sequences give essential facts about the affected people’s lives before and after the VUE. Linguistic and ornithological experts regularly comment on the events; some of them will be introduced later as struck by the VUE themselves. A couple of names prove to be pseudonyms for other people, faults and fakes in the directory or just a bogus. The

types of presentation are manifold: documentary style biographies alternate with interview formats, tabloid coverage, reports from different places of the world and personal family portraits. In its structure, the film acts as a heterogeneous collection of files and records that boldly represent coherence where there is hardly any to be found. Therefore, a narration is needed, which gives a comprehensive story that legitimises the event as well as its outcome. THE FALLS can be read as a rhetoric or historiographical narrative that sports a very well-known literary topos: the passion of mankind and its salvation by sacrifice. The VUE then would have to be conceived as a purging event, which is explained and legitimised by the commission. The victims though, would then be incorporated as martyrs, witnesses, and living (or, even better, dead) memorials of its truth and significance. For modern standards, a genetic ‘historical’ narration would require some elucidating and disentangling examinations; some systematic comparison and unambiguous classification. At the same time, references to mythical and other ‘irrational’ modes of storytelling help to recognise and honour the collective suffering as well as the interpretative authority of the storyteller. All of which is to be found in THE FALLS: The victims are classified by different types, their suffering and their aptitude for martyrdom, which is well investigated, and diverse theories for the explanation of the event are offered and discussed. The VUE commission is collecting all data and at the same time appointing patterns of interpretation. The commission’s narrative, though it covers a chaotic event, is characterised by some basic organising principles, such as the alphabet (from Falla- to Fallw-), numeration of biographies (1–92), formats of presentation (photographic documentation, live report, interview, etc.) as well as the allocation of authority to its own members and experts. This immanent logic of order is accompanied by rhythmic constituents like montage, instrumental music, and paradigmatic songs like the ‘VUE hymn’ and a ‘Bird List Song.’ Peculiar is a consistent combination of the taxonomic utility of the ordering device with a sensual component that only at a first sight supports the underlying narrative. For example, the alphabet as well as the numeration of the biographies fulfil not only their usual functions as pretended neutral ordering systems, but they also provide (at times) contradicting services of suspense and dramaturgical orientation. Nevertheless, the normative approach of THE FALLS will be increasingly corrupted in the course of the plot. The viewer’s scepticism against the narrative structure grows due to subtle or overt disturbances. For one, the singular event of the VUE is presented, described, and reviewed in ninety-two successive tales of suffering, but all the differing facts and facets, the individual questions and conclusions about this event, create conflicting narrations. Increasingly, the VUE commission seems not to be able to manage the situation and to give its authoritarian reading the prevalence needed. Constantly repeated stereotypes and prejudices counteract the pretended scientific methods of discrete

numeration and alphabetical accumulation. Similarly, the dramatic over-structuring of the directory is disintegrating its coherence. Perpetually, new attempts occur to systematise all concerned information. Like abstract formal operations, they increasingly perform recursive procedures on the incoherent data. These modern principles of itemisation attract Greenaway’s attention – he himself calls his projects “catalogue movies” (cf. Maciel, 2006:55). To him, the multiple possibilities of reading a list, its continuity and its discontinuity, its fortuity as well as its taxonomic accuracy promise infinite opportunities of storytelling. Even more, Greenaway is expanding and superimposing those reading possibilities by adding absurd, surplus, and aberrant facts and objects as well as confronting them with image and sound references that dissolve any sense of definiteness and orientation. He “tends to employ a rigorous ordering principle in his films, while, at the same time, from this order he makes an uncontrollable disorder emerge” (ibid:57). Beyond that, the sheer amount of new languages resists their investigation and any failing attempt to translate or even describe them entirely refers to the ambivalences and agonies of taxonomic analysis and representation by language. Additionally, many recurring allegoric or metaphoric motifs influence the perception of narrative: water as the spring of life as well as a source of insecurity and fear; man’s dream of flying as a promise and an endangerment; birds and ornithology as a medium of prediction as well as metaphors for the oncoming death. Those tropes and images bring up a deep ambivalence and a sensual connection of the underlying narrative with danger and fundamental fears. Such ambiguous and complementary elements of the narrative structure give an irritating impression of the cracks and gaps in any attempt to reduce complexity and fortuity to a simple story line. The narrative of order and sense that is established with some effort by the VUE commission is repeatedly challenged by its own ‘documentary’ demands and the excessive flow of facts and information. All attempts to analyse using a rational method and narrative embedding show nothing other than the randomness of a singular and ambiguous event that cannot be completely captured and measured by scientific approaches. Its mythical topoi and patterns of storytelling do not prove to be sustainable and provoke covert as well as upfront counteraction. All efforts to install a conjunction between the incidentally selected ninety-two out of nineteen million victims go astray in the end. Any modern attempt to order the world by telling a continuous and coherent story and defining it as an inevitable truth is marked as voluntaristic. Greenaway calls it a modern way of myth making or, the other way around, an attempt “to come to terms with disasters by encoding them – or representing them – through language.”² The taxonomic classification of causes, outcomes, and techniques of containment by and through language is revealed in its totalising tendency as well as its futility against non-controllable chaos. In fact, the actual material, the biographic data and documents

of the victims, resist its representation with growing abundance. In content and form, in patterns of visual exposure and narrative interpretation the chaos takes over: facts derange and contradict each other, images and events experience multiple interpretations, causalities get negated and all the commission’s categories prove to be futile. Moreover, at the end of the film the whole encyclopaedic project is to be jeopardised. Leasting Fallvo, a renowned VUE commission biographer, turns out to be a notorious inventor of stories, whose abilities to coin tales and anecdotes instantly improve even further after his own affection by the VUE. “It was said that if the VUE had not happened, then Leasting Fallvo could have invented it” (Greenaway 1980: biogr. 91). Finally, the viewer is set out an over-structured farrago of images, stories, and impressions that degrades the underlying narrative to a mere accessory. However, Greenaway exceeds the viewer’s disorientation even more. The reduction of the VUE narrative to substantial nonsense with a simultaneous indication of a reflexive position on power structures and interpretative competences is not the only aesthetic strategy the artist is pursuing. Rather, he comes up with specific formal practices to put forth not only cognitive processes of disillusion, but also aesthetic and sensual experiences that allow alternative ways of handling contingency. Consequently, it is argued that Greenaway’s style of storytelling is a *mannerist* one; considering his combining of explicit and metaphorical language, sequential and paratactic image structures, allegoric ordering systems and metonymic connotations, all of which lead directly into artificiality and reflexivity, or otherwise into nonsense and chaos. By that, Greenaway excessively overstrains the viewer through intending a “losing count” (Woods, 1996:25) in the overflowing and aberrant complexity of images, language, music, and action. The disturbing and complementing elements of his films constitute a network of relations that invites the viewer to enter and to transit in order to keep up communication with the artistic cosmos of the film-maker.

Therefore, THE FALLS is exemplifying how the constant categorisation or fragmentation of the uncanny world and the entirety of nature leads to an increasing ambivalence and opacity. The manic and arbitrary systematisation refers to the ambivalent phenomenon of the encyclopaedic project in the *Age of Reason* that aims to universally depict the entire world as a phenomenon and system. At the same time, the preliminary and symbolic referencing systems within the film are reminiscent of the cabinets of curiosities and wonders of the European Renaissance and Baroque that tried to build up a completely new cosmos by staging it within a closed monad (Bredenkamp, 1995:51–80). The conspicuously mannerist character of this attempt to order a chaotic structure shows up in such symbolic seclusion, but then again also in the many invitations the viewer receives to get into his or her own story. Throughout the film there are proposals for choosing and dropping, for linking into different theories and conspiracies and, fundamentally, to believe or disbelieve. Consequences for perception are two-fold. On the

one hand, schemes and conspiracies characterise the diegetic level and entangle and bind the viewer by narrative means. On the other hand, on the deictic level the documentary character of THE FALLS is brought to display as – like in any other film – a total conspiracy of the film-maker with his audience. Moreover, by this perception, “conspiracy theory becomes a theory of reading” (Lawrence, 1997:43). Here Greenaway’s mannerist storytelling appears in full bloom. Events and their significant figures become equally de-substantiated and pure ‘facts’ become indistinguishable from their fictitious description and contextualisation. Before the very eyes of the viewer, an enclosed cosmos of stories and information emerges and vanishes again.

The most prominent and arguably most important key to enter the story net of THE FALLS is the question of its authorship. Subversive paralleling and disturbances of its ‘straight’ narrative rapidly call into question the first impression of an academic documentation by the VUE commission – the asserted author of the film was deconstructed by at least one more outside observer. However, this narrative authority is not by implication allocated to Greenaway because the whole narration is accompanied by an exceptional figure of intermediation: the ubiquitous Tulse Luper. Luper does not limit himself to a mere character in the plot, but instead actively influences the narrative and its course.

There are vast hints at that Greenawayean *alter ego*, as Luper is indicated as author of short stories that are of importance in some biographies. As well, his book ‘Birds of the Northern Hemisphere’ out of VERTICAL FEATURES REMAKE is mentioned.³ Together with his referenced ornithological as well as psychological expertise, he affects behaviours and preferences of other characters, especially members of the VUE commission. He comments as an expert on birds and bird languages and seems to have a more or less outspoken impact on the project biographies. Vassian Falluger says about him that he was “the Violent Unknown Event’s master strategist and cataloguer,” though the world-wide known nineteenth century ornithologist J.J. Audubon could have occupied that position, too (Greenaway 1980: biogr. 87). Also, Luper may be identical to Erhaus Bewler Falluper: next to his name it is not by a coincidence that he is characterised as “a master cataloguer, an enumerator and a collector of statistics” (ibid: biogr. 88). He conducted forty-one interviews with ordinary people about their ornithological skills some time before the VUE. Those interviews would be the blueprint for the Standard Directory project since Falluper chose his interviewees because of their surnames, beginning with FALL. Finally, the end credits of THE FALLS name Luper as a production adviser, whilst it remains nebulous what his distinct function would have been.

All those cues establish Luper as the key figure, which covertly orders THE FALLS. His position and his impact on the plot and its structure and development allow for the consideration of him as an ‘author’ or, rather, an ambiguous representative of the author-teller Peter Greenaway. He is endued with knowledge that other

characters are lacking and he is in the position to use it. However, he does not tell the stories himself. Instead, Luper works as a mediatory instance in a multi-layered conspiracy with the audience. Therefore, there is no definitive answer to the ‘author question’ within THE FALLS: “As the film ends we see that the figure of the author is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, a fiction that can seem particularly sturdy or can dissolve before you” (Lawrence, 1997:43). Nevertheless, Luper’s influence and intrigue, along with his actions of equally fabricating and hindering the coherence of the VUE encyclopaedia, bring him into the focus of attention – less as an author, but so much more as a storyteller of his own right. Luper acts, for a first definition, as an intermediary on a pivot line between Greenaway and his audience. He comments on the fabula as well as on the act of fabulation and, by doing that, communicates with the viewer within and beyond the narrative.

Baroque Perspectivities: THE TULSE LUPER SUITCASES (2003ff)

There is no such thing as history, there are only historians.
(Peter Greenaway 2004a: ep. IV, sc. 39)

Encyclopaedias, even an eccentric and arbitrary one as THE FALLS, need regular revision. Therefore, it seems plausible that Greenaway updated it within a completely new project called THE TULSE LUPER SUITCASES (TLS). This ambitious undertaking cannot be called just a film anymore – it is a potentially infinite collection of multi-media events, which have been produced, performed, and distributed discontinuously and decentralised since 2003. Up until now, TLS consists of a three-part, approximately seven hour long cinema film, a multi-part interactive DVD- and CD-ROM-collection, some books, and website projects, exhibitions in Italy, Belgium, the UK, the Netherlands, and Brazil with their respective catalogues as well as a still on-going series of live art and video performances at festivals world-wide. Within those different channels, Greenaway constantly generates new occurrences of the project that virtually never come to a definitive end.

TLS claims to be nothing less than an encyclopaedic compendium of the history of the twentieth century – completely structured by and around the singular figure of Tulse Luper, though there are ninety-one other main characters. Accordingly, TLS is mainly a biographic project; it reconstructs or pledges to be a reconstruction of the life history of Tulse Luper. In being so, it remains, as THE FALLS did, a historical mock-up that calls attention more to ‘doing’ historiography than to ‘the history’ itself. However, whereas THE FALLS concentrated on a textual narrative that was compromised by discontinuous storytelling, TLS works more on images as a central element of an appropriation of the past. Thus, it will be indicated that Greenaway is adopting another means of mannerist attitude in order to represent a disordered world.

TLS offers an open-ended history project that calls for interaction

and interference. Accordingly, there is no pivotal story line alongside which the viewer, or rather the user, could work through the vast quantity of facts and fiction. The recipient has to decide on his own what part of TLS he is choosing first and next. All formats though give credence to a particular path of scientific research and history writing – belonging to a complex canvas of Luper research, established by an equally fictional and real community of investigators. All of them aim to reconstruct the whole life history of Tulse Luper by following his traces and connections, by reading and interpreting his works and – most importantly – by finding and analysing the ninety-two suitcases he left all over the world. Those suitcases and their owner are depicted as being connected to any considerable event, every important person, and each significant movement of the twentieth century.

Luper is to be characterised as a traveller, a seeker and adventurer whose life long aim would be to “find things [...] people have lost” (Peter Greenaway 2003: ep. I, sc. 14). This is why he is on the tramp, travelling without destination and always getting caught by external circumstances. He collects abstruse and banal objects, looks for lost and forgotten places and by doing this he casually re-writes history. There again his essential role within TLS lies in storytelling. Throughout his life Luper is an overwhelmingly productive writer, an encyclopaedist, visual artist, and librettist. His notes and treatises, his essays, newspaper reports, plays and sketches, his drawings and charts as well as his films influence the artistic production of a whole century. Any research on him seems to be legitimised by the productivity and importance of his works. However, at the end of the third part of the cinema film, at the opening of a huge exhibition on Luper’s legacy, as the long anticipated ninety-second suitcase is unsealed, another revelation takes place. It contains spectacular evidence that upsets any speculation and facts about him. Most shocking is the allegation that Martino Knockavelli, Luper’s best friend and prevalent companion on many of his journeys, invented all of Luper’s stories and projected his own likes and dislikes, prejudices and fantasies on him. Apparently, Luper died in 1921, aged ten years old, under a collapsing brick wall. Within a second, the genetic approach of any Luper biography and also of the narrative medium of cinema is rendered obsolete. The assumedly objective historiographical storytelling that is based on references and evidence as well as on artefacts and trusted sources in order to produce a straight-line story of evolution and ordering proves to be a purely interpretative undertaking. Like Leasting Fallvo in THE FALLS, Martino Knockavelli serves Greenaway as a culmination point for many fortuitous stories. His exposure reveals the fiction of any ‘objective’ attempt to describe the past, the future or even the present time. The reference of historiography as well as the illusionary machine of cinema to an exterior truth – may it be the historical *res factae* or even ‘present reality’ as ontological categories – is discovered as irreducibly bound to and only constituted in language. Nevertheless, TLS gives reasons for a form of historiography that

complies with the present need for regulative storytelling and with the necessity to cope with a history that is conceived to be more catastrophic and discontinuous than advancing and progressing. A characteristic model for Greenaway’s ‘history-telling’ can be found in the third part of the film in which Luper fulfils his order to tell the wife of a Soviet colonel three stories a day with great serenity. The one thousand and one stories of his Gulag Scheherazade consistently interfere with the on-going story line of the episodes, as they intermit with the fabula of the reconstructive history project called TLS. Every story is akin to the others, but still a completely new one. With their constant rerun of the similar in new shapes and forms, Luper’s memoranda of the contingent world order teach us its phenomenological depth and richness. A key attribute of Greenawayean storytelling is indeed repetition, enriched by improvisation.

Greenaway’s preferred structuring method in TLS is playing games: like on a chessboard, figures and events are being repositioned again and again – neither always clearly arranged nor moved by consistent rules, but plain and planned, at least at the start. However, playing games is always jeopardous, as regularity can be suspended and the flow of action gets in the way of control – incalculable and risky operations occur *inter ludium*. The actuality and totality of every game of life and death that is called history produce vast potentialities, but also exclusions and detachments, especially of the defeated dead (de Certeau, 1988:56).

With the knowledge and experience of the twentieth century, any systematic or idealistic attempt to make the past disposable, to bridge the gulf to the present time, has to be accepted as failed. Accordingly, Greenaway is approaching the past by telling his own story, or many stories, of singular events and personal *vitae* that do not claim to be ‘the’ history. Instead, the pivotal events of the twentieth century are told by the life histories of ninety-two ‘main characters’ whose paths were crossing at neuralgic points in ‘world history.’ Furthermore, those life (his)stories do not hide the aching wounds, the scars and open spots of a catastrophic century in a calming and legitimising master-narrative, but instead show them and keep them positively present. In the light of Walter Benjamin’s materialistic historiography (2003:389ff), the stories Luper is collecting can be seen as tales of the other, the subaltern and dislocated. Amongst others, he tries to keep hold of the cultural peculiarities of pursued and eliminated ethnic minorities in the Second World War as well as in the genocides, mass displacements and imprisonments during the Cold War. At the same time, he asks for the distortions and impacts of an industrialised world order that immeasurably interfered into the wider and nearer environment of man.

Thus, the essential element for the quality and success of history-telling is the knowledge of the place and the overt praxis of the historian and the storyteller. As a keeper of the social memory of a community, he not only serves the requirements for compensation of harrowing experience, but also avouches the sustainability of

that community. Hence, the *mediality* of his remembering and storytelling comes into focus – the question, whether one’s own position is seen in its historicity and how eager ambitions are to bring the past in a lively way to the present (cf. Runia, 2006:1–5). In TLS, paradigmatically the place of the storyteller is retained in an image of a closed cosmos: in episode one of the film, Luper and Knockavelli (as children) sit in a coal cellar, populating this place of warmth and fantasy with people and plans for their life to come. After the experience of World War I, the real world is not their playground anymore, but their imaginary cosmos of conceit. “What are you going to be later on, Lupey? If you grow up. – [...] Not a coalminer. Or a soldier. I’ll go abroad. [...] I want to find things. – What sort of things? – Things people have lost. [...] Lost cities. People. Men. Women” (Peter Greenaway 2003: ep. I, sc. 14). In Luper’s plans to collect and restore this imaginary world of lost things, people, and discourses, a desire for a naive order shows up; an attempt to make visible the plenty of the given world without a preliminary hierarchy. On the screen, as a symbol for that order, looms the dark treasure chest of a ten-year old boy containing writing instruments, a compass, game cards, magnifying glasses, a skull, lamps, and a gas mask. It alludes to the playful and ambivalent character of any exploration of the world; the allurements and endangerments of discovering unknown territories. This allegoric collection of ‘toys’ right at the beginning of the movie establishes a specific type of composition that reminds more of a baroque chamber of curiosities than a modernist collection of historical facts. Luper’s world consists of emblems and symbols that are still to be filled by writing and storytelling. Without prejudices and particular expectations, he enters his life that was withdrawn of security and straightforwardness. However, he still has something to do; a task for life – to tell stories.

Like in the dark chamber of Luper’s childhood, throughout TLS the engagement with images is the most peculiar aspect. As Greenaway is constantly asking for the basic conditions of cinematic representation (cf. Greenaway, 2003), TLS is considering how the representation of history is working with and by images. For that Greenaway takes into account the cinematic attempt to suspend disbelief: an important impulse he gets out of the idea of a Total Art, which he alludes more to in the seventeenth than to the nineteenth century. The capacity of the cinematic apparatus to affect the viewer reminds him of the absolutist and counter-reformist efforts to suspend any religious, political and generally epistemological doubt and scepticism by artificial means.⁴ By combining conventionalised narrative with an overwhelming multi-media experience the recipient shall – in favour of sentimental affection – abandon all reservations against that exact artificiality. The seminal techniques of such a *suspension of disbelief* are, according to Greenaway, initiated in Renaissance art and carried to the extreme in the Baroque.



Image 1 – Albrecht Dürer: *Artist and nude*, ca. 1525.

Entering the Modern Age I: The single-eyed perception apparatus

At the turning point from an art that ideally just imitated nature (*imitatio naturae*) to a position of artistic ‘autonomy,’⁵ a paradigm shift in the forms of representation in European history of arts and sciences took place. A peculiar feature of the newly found stylistic language was the synthesising of different media according to a superior idea that was not present in the media itself – a closed religious, political, and aesthetic system enacted itself by instrumentally using symbolic forms and gestures and exactly within that justified its operationality. Thus, it’s religious and courtly arts that in an overwhelming and all-embracing communication process propagated, proclaimed, and (re-)produced absolutist order and its fundamental conditions in concrete, exemplary and ideal form and manner.⁶

At the same time, it was not mandatory for those *concrete* artworks to be organised in a *discrete* way; that is to say they were not committed to an endless and univocal order. Early baroque epistemology took a critical stand on the Renaissance ideals concerning human perception and comprehension. Neither imitative representation of nature and reality, nor strict containment of the particular to a yet to find universal classification dominated scientific and artistic positions; rather, they were characterised by an acknowledgement of the phenomenological plenitude of the exceptional and the dissent as constituents a truly unique and compelling world. The correlative aesthetic strategy was later called *maniera* or *capriccio*: medial constellations that depict the cornucopia by ensuing exuberant, frothing, and fluidising principles of order, which outplay the old static and futile ones (cf. Hocke, 1957). Whether those sketches and paintings, those stage or architectural designs, were obeying the conditions of central perspective or not, its fundamentum, the sovereignty of the frame-making subject, was brought into fluctuation by the baroque perspectivity of *inflection*.⁷ The mediality and artificiality of those

consolidation attempts, of the baroque, ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’, were openly admitted.

Greenaway is interested in exactly such shifts and cracks; such variations and discontinuities in the aesthetic perceptions of a historical present. He connects the cinematic disposition of media as a strictly modern phenomenon with baroque conventions for the perception of art and tries to implement such an artistic attitude into his projects.⁸ By doing so, he aspires to deconstruct and overcome the ‘tyrannies of cinema’ – text-bound, frame-driven, camera- and actor-dependent as it seems to be (cf. Greenaway, 2003). Therefore, he refers to aesthetic strategies that long before and beyond the invention of the cinematograph were engaged in depicting the world and bringing it into mediated experience. First of all, Greenaway is criticising the mode of central perspective and its carrier – the single eyed camera apparatus. He is especially troubled by the implied localisation of the observer within the cinematic disposition that is defined by the rigid view of the camera and the world-cutting frame. The transformation of a three-dimensional object or space onto a plain canvas by focussing and decomposing (cf. image 1), according to Roland Barthes, makes cinema a modern “dioptrical art” (Barthes 1979:70ff). Its fetish-like perspective, which grounds modern perception since Albrecht Dürer and Leon Battista Alberti, calls up Greenaway’s caution and opposition.

Within TLS, Greenaway performs vast techniques of image splitting, framing within and against other frames as well as fading and blending. Sequences are shown from different angles, whether ‘harmonised’ on the same time code or offset and interfering. Within multiple frames different takes of the same shot are combined, layered, switched, and adjusted. Cuts and blacks, contrasting and continuity shots are not located between the images, but within. Montage is not a matter of succession, but of simultaneity. Like in mediaeval triptychs or in highly mannerist compositions, images get spatialised – dismembered, layered, and clustered into conflicting parts that hold still and move at the same time. The viewer has to constantly take up new perspectives and to coordinate his different perceptions within one sequence. Additionally, those images get charged with a sensuality that also remind of baroque mannerism, which are de-emotionalised and distanced, but yet very affective in their impact. Like in El Greco’s ‘Count Orgaz’ (cf. image 2) or Velázquez’ ‘Las Meninas’, the viewer is directly addressed by different means, looked at and struck by a concussive message: this is about you, testifying the order of life and, especially, death. Moreover, Greenaway’s affinity to the dark ground of the image, his own type of *chiaroscuro*, moves the observer to fluctuate. The wide open spaces of a train station, the endless horizon of the American Moab desert or the depth of Rembrandt-like illuminated interiors are confronted within one image with the claustrophobic narrowness of closed chambers and compartments. Blackened studio shots are edited into generous landscape tracking. Additionally, daylight shots with an enormous plasticity of the



Image 2 – El Greco: *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1586–1588. Entering the Modern Age II: Re-ordering the rules, reflecting a personal perspective

interior correspond and conflict with spotlighting and contouring that let the shapes blur beyond recognition and only vaguely brings the bodies and objects out of the dark. A gloomy ground of indeterminacy, a visual spatialisation of infinity that reaches far beyond ‘regular’ space order is to be found in many sequences. Such a *fuscum* or *fond*, as Deleuze called it, also characterised a lot of mannerist art stylistically and epistemologically. Greenaway’s images appear to be undercoated by a baroque knowledge and its captivation to the arcane, the enigmatic and the mani-folded.⁹ By using such techniques of composing, by designating frames and points of view and by intervening into image space and narrative time Greenaway truly creates *palimpsests* on the screen. A magnitude of story lines, memorisations, and possible interpretations are folded therein and the viewer is consistently invited to come near and to look, to read and to decipher, whereas the palimpsest gets written over and over. Even more than THE FALLS, TLS overstrains its viewers as it advocates a ‘losing count’ that requests the development of an individual perspective. The viewer is not just facing the film image anymore, more than that he is implemented into the experimental arrangement and its processing – he is ensnared into interplay of self-empowering and powerlessness with regard to representative images. As in baroque chambers of curiosities in TLS, a performative space of observing and display opens up. This multidimensional space addresses an active user that appreciates dealing with the inventive impulses of ordering systems with discontinuous narratives and combination games. Therefore, it appears plausible that Greenaway by himself re-orders his stories and images all the time and does not aspire to a definite state for them. Besides interactive DVDs and website projects, which actively advocate several conjunctions of objects, knowledge, and presentation modes, he also created different formats of ‘staging’ for TLS, which included theatre and opera events as well as elaborate exhibitions that presented the project in a most open and communicative way (cf. Elliot/Purdy, 2005). Finally, a series of ‘Live Video Jockeying Performances’ sporadically continues the project up until now. Within that, Greenaway re-orders the project material in real-time and even produces completely new imagery by high-level editing techniques. The projection and perception set-up by those live events is differing from a classic cinema experience in several ways. Firstly, there are at least three screens with different projections, so the viewer has to choose and focus all the time. Secondly, not all screens can be seen equally from everywhere, therefore, the individual perceptions vary amongst each other and the viewer is even invited to move around the place. Thirdly, with the lack of a continuous and coherent story line, narrative chronology and intentional montage is hindered or at least challenged. Moreover and fourthly, Greenaway is always visible at his control desk and accredits himself as the one who is carrying out every new arrangement, who repeats and re-enacts his stories and images and yet tells them every time anew.



The downright baroque multiplication of perspectives within Greenaway’s archive of stories and images, which can be retrieved and re-arranged at any time, captures a facet of modern historiography that, according to Michel de Certeau, has to be made consciously: writing history is a playful *practice* used by societies to make explicit, put in miniature, and formalise their most fundamental strategies and *by that act out themselves* without the risks and responsibilities of ‘making’ history itself (de Certeau, 1988:9). However, historiography as a “staging of the past” (ibid.) and as a game originating in the present that is ruled by only that present is not just a pastime, instead it is a societal necessity – to put the haunting past into a bearable and conciliatory relation to oneself. As a result, within TLS history is ‘staged’ again by the sequence of indications about figures and events, about atrocities and disasters of the twentieth century. However, this re-enactment is done in the most artificial way and without any demand to create something like a ‘historical truth’. Instead, it occurs with the greatest sensitivity for the experience and the potentialities of a “presence of the past” (Runia, 2006:5ff, cf. also Benjamin, 2003). The distinctiveness of Tulse Luper – and with him Greenaway – as a historian can be seen in his annalist handling of the dissonances and discontinuities of his life history, which end up not in a secured and risk-less narrative of the past or even of a subject, but in a dislocation and a discontinuous practice – of remembering, selecting, arranging, and story-telling, over and over again, in any way and to be always continued.

Conclusion: Cinema as a Medium of a Contemporary Historiography

[...] I think some of the most exciting periods in cultural history have been highly mannerist. [...] [T]he first [...] related to the renaissance, the baroque. The second, I suppose, which can be related to the cultural confidence of Louis IV. [sic], to the French revolution. And the third period is now, from virtually the collapsing modernism to something we are still searching for. [...] But underneath I think we are now in a very exiting melting pot. (Greenaway in Frommer, 1996:194)

Greenaway’s interest in the artistic styles and epistemological insecurities of those periods with a “cultural lack of confidence” (ibid.) relates directly to current modes of representation of historical and cultural order. His foremost occupation with the cinematic disposition of narrative, image, and storytelling moves him to deconstruct current conventions of cinematic perception. Firstly, Greenaway questions the conventional way of cinematic narration. His discontinuous story lines, the disclosure of mythical patterns in ‘rational’ narratives of order and sense, and the general discussion of language as a medium of ‘coming to terms with disaster’ result in an encyclopaedic narrative structure that demands an active and following observer. Secondly, Greenaway exposes

central perspective as a fundamental principle of cinema that by its singular eye orientation and ideo-real frame cuts regularly reduce its perception possibilities. In his imagery the basic conditions of this Renaissance-born way of composition are discussed and deconstructed. The viewer is requested to constantly relocate himself towards his images and to question his own habits and inscribed patterns of perception. The potential of films to insinuate continuity and homogeneity by linear perspective and a harmonious montage is equally recognised and discussed. Greenaway puts the whole ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ into question, like, for example, in a Brechtian epic opera Greenaway follows the principle of a “radical separation of the elements” (Brecht, 1964:37, cf. Elliot/Purdy, 1997:63–79) and lets them take effect on their own without any subordination to a singular idea or univocal fabula.¹⁰ At the very least, Tulse Luper as a third disturbance of cinematic conventions brings in another view, if not many different perspectives on his surrounding. He comes in as an author and a storyteller in his own right who accounts for the (his)stories told and even provides their content. However, at the same time his persistent refusal to be characterised and depicted in one valid Luper fabula or even a personality is unhinging the scenarios and leading any cinematic attempt to create representations again to no end. In a last refusal within TLS, Luper’s function as such an intermediary comes to a terminal expression, as the last of his one thousand and one stories he had to tell to save his life reports on himself:

Story 1001. A man was kept a prisoner on a bridge for 1.001 days. He was forced to play chess with a colonel and to write stories for the colonel’s wife. When he finally managed to make an escape, he could no longer differentiate between the move of a pawn and a queen and had no more stories to tell. He was walking the world without restraint—playing games of life without rules, and he had been drained of stories. He was free in all the ways he had ever wanted to be. (Peter Greenaway 2004b: ep. XIV, sc. 33)

Luper is walking freely now, without order and intent, neither committed to an ideology nor following a “grand narrative” (Lyotard) – just “playing games of life without rules.” Therewith, he is completely displaced and no longer has an exemplary impact. Such a utopian existence between all orders, beyond norms and rules, outlying time and space, is a prospect that the ‘minor narratives’ and language games of Tulse Luper can provide – a promise and an invitation to live in and with the finiteness and solitude of man. “Cinema is dead, long live cinema” (Greenaway, 2003): in times when cinema is challenged like never before by a large number of image related media that get smaller, faster, and more mobile all the time, Greenaway is still promoting it as a medium of relevance

and serious occupation within the present time. With his special attempt to make films by mannerist means, by over-structuring and overburdening them in a most artificial way, he unfolds the historicity of cinema and marks it as a structurally modern phenomenon. Moreover, by referring to all the differences and translations and especially the diversified history of the cinematic media and arts, Peter Greenaway also creates playful possibilities to perceive language, images, and sound that lie beyond the homogeneous and continuous narratives of classical cinema. At the same time, his examination of strategies for the suspension of disbelief uncovers not only the rigid historic images of totalitarian ideologies, but also refers to most recent historiographies that again relate themselves to religious, territorial or ‘cultural’ fixing points. Greenaway’s alternative to the grand, univocal, linear, and genetic narrative of such historicisms is a style of iteration – a constant re-telling and modification of the master-narratives and their fragmentation into manifold individual stories. Within THE FALLS and THE TULSE LUPER SUITCASES alike, history is personalised without making it understandable or even controllable. In a context of a self-reflexive cinematic situation and within the space and time of ‘reading’ and experiencing those films, an awareness arises for the order-generating power of stories and perspectives. Even more, one not only recognises, but in a way corporeally experiences and perceives (in the Aristotelian meaning of *aisthesis*) how those artificial means acquire a presence in our lives. After all, making (and consuming) cinema for Greenaway is mostly an ethical occupation (cf. Woods, 1996:228ff; Frommer, 1996:193f; Greenaway, 2003:1f). With Luper, a slight antidote to the totalising efforts of present times emerges – an overtly representative, allegoric figuration of an author who exposes himself as contingent and predetermined to decay. He steps in between the fabula and the storyteller; between the composed image and the tracing eye. With and by the ubiquitous Tulse Luper, some interminable, consistently reshaping communication process between the storyteller, Peter Greenaway, and the observer is brought into play. What follows is up to the latter.

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Notes

- ¹ This paper reflects some key points of the author’s dissertation thesis on history and figure-based storytelling in the artwork of Peter Greenaway; cf. Braun, 2012.
- ² Cited after <http://web.archive.org/web/20121011010616/http://www.btinternet.com/~paul.melia/meta2.html> (accessed in 2013/06/15).
- ³ Furthermore, Luper is as always connected to other Greenaway films, namely TREE (1966), WATER (1975), and A WALK THROUGH H (1978).
- ⁴ This refers to many statements by Greenaway himself, recapitulated in an interview in Woods, 1996:261ff, and in Greenaway, 2003.
- ⁵ Of course this is less to be seen as the artist’s independence from a contractor or from being exploited for political and religious reasons, but more as an autonomy against mimesis and the promises of reality in central perspective oriented art.
- ⁶ Because the existence of the absolute, ontologically grounded entity of God had come into question, images or, more precisely, multi-media systems were to reconstitute the lost totality and

to leverage a new form of power exercise. Especially sacral and courtly architecture as well as court and academic theatre can be acknowledged as the paradigmatic arts that encountered the shattering experiences of religious war, cultural distortions and scientific revolution.

⁷ For inflection as a principle of thought in the Baroque as well as in present times cf. Deleuze, 1993:15ff.

⁸ Cf. fundamentally Elliot/Purdy, 1997, esp. 8–26; also Woods, 1996:137–73.

⁹ For the implications of a baroque chiaroscuro and the folded perspectives in El Greco’s, Caravaggio’s, and Tintoretto’s artwork, cf. Deleuze, 1993:28–43, esp. 35f.

¹⁰ For a more detailed analysis of this aspect in Greenaway’s work cf. Braun, 2012:107–30, as well as, for another filmic example, Braun, 2011.



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