



The Belly of an Architect

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

A contemporary review

Experienced viewers of Peter Greenaway's films, even if they are relatively familiar with architectural history, might have suspected or hoped that Etienne-Louis Boullée was a figment of the Greenaway imagination, and that the life and works so elaborately constructed by Stourley Kracklite were some amazing spoof with drawings by Greenaway's own hand. They will be considerably disappointed to discover that Boullée not only existed but also penned a treatise on architecture which had some small impact at the end of the 18th century. His role in the film, therefore, is not to represent the teasing playfulness we have come to expect from this director, for this is a film about another draughtsman's contract or the difficult relation of draughtsmen with their patrons (Kracklite with his; Boullée, few of whose plans were ever realised, with his). Boullée, child of the revolutionary era, believed in the moral and cultural vocation of architecture and, like most artists of his generation, viewed Rome as the hallowed source of creative inspiration. In Boullée's case, however, it was Rome as seen through the fantastic imagination of Piranesi and, like the American professor in *Changing Places*, he was careful not to destroy the illusion by confrontation with the present reality of the object of his dreams.

The fascination of the eternal city is beautifully realised in a series of architectural and corporeal contrasts. On the one hand, there is the classical perfection of the Pantheon, with its dome and façade of pillars, a mausoleum for the illustrious which serves as a backdrop for Kracklite's reception to Rome. On the other hand, the Victor Emmanuel monument, in which the Boullée exhibition is to be held, hitherto considered something of a white elephant in its neobaroque exuberance, also a mausoleum but here a graveyard of Kracklite's dreams and the scene of his death. Finally, there are Boullée's own designs, whose attraction perhaps is that they escape the dialectic of excess and restraint by being at once massive, geometric and unrealisable for the most part.

Boullée was clearly an architect who had meditated on the great pyramid and who was fascinated – as perhaps his project for a monument to Isaac Newton shows – by the mystical mathematics of construction. A similar set of paradoxes is embodied in the contrasting physical qualities of the protagonists and, in particular, the inspired casting of Caspasian and Kracklite. The lean and hungry Lambert Wilson, immaculate in his double-breasted suits and slicked-back hair is, paradoxically, the representative of the decadent and Machiavellian Old World with its drapery, rich colours and

cynicism; while the too-generously proportioned Brian Dennehy, with his paunch, his messy beard and his propensity, in the Kracklite persona, to alcoholic excesses, comes from the New World of puritanism, naivety and inhibition. It is a pity that Kracklite's wife Louisa, who serves as the link between these two extremes, is not more capable of embodying the contradiction within herself.

Like so many of Greenaway's films, *The Belly of an Architect* draws a number of circles round a number of questions without ever approaching them head on. Indeed, bits of the film are more like absent-minded doodles than elements germane to the narrative. For example, do men ever possess the same creative ability as women? Kracklite experiences what appears to be a phantom pregnancy with the same nine-month period of gestation as that of his wife. In the meantime, in his obsessive quest for an explanation, he perambulates Rome, inspecting the bellies of its emperors in the city's profusion of statuary. In much the same way as the entrails of sacrificial beasts were supposed to augur well or ill for some momentous venture, so Kracklite collects images of these statues and magnifies the guts in the hope that some clue will emerge. In so doing, he perhaps produces a paradigm of Roman culture, with its combination of austerity and excess, its public virtue and private vice, summed up here in the image of Augustus and his modern descendant, Kracklite.

If one chooses to see *The Belly of an Architect* as an Englishman's exploration of the paradoxes of his culture, it is an extremely moving film. The Roman setting, the extraordinary beauty of Sacha Vierny's photography, the richness of the colours, the fabrics and the stones, all the aesthetic indulgence that British or, for that matter, North American culture rejects, are beautifully deployed here in a context which brilliantly exposes both their fascination and the discomfort they engender. After all, as Kracklite learns from a doctor, many of these emperors came to very sticky ends. Where *The Belly of an Architect* is less satisfactory is in its characterisation, or even its capacity to make us concerned with its characters whose antics, when not inadvertently comic, are banal. There are one or two genuinely amusing gags – the old man who fakes a heart attack to publicise the exhibition, the tramp who chops noses off statues – but these are relatively infrequent. However, in the context of the Greenaway oeuvre, *The Belly of an Architect* appears to stand against the grids, taxonomies and lists that have become so familiar – all those previous attempts to marshal the world into some kind of visually representable order – so as to give room and expression to the emotions. Perhaps this is the film of Greenaway's own mid-life crisis.

Jill Forbes, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1987

THE BELLY OF AN ARCHITECT

Director: Peter Greenaway
Production Companies: Mondial, Tangram Film, Callender Company, Hemdale Holdings, SACIS
International Sales Consultants: Gavin Film
Financial Assistance: British Screen, Film Four International
Executive Producers for Tangram Films: Roberto Levi, Claudio Biondi
Producers: Colin Callender, Walter Donohue
Associate Producers: Conchita Airolti, Dino De Dionisio
Location Manager: Luigi Lagrasta
Location Permits: Enzo Prosperini
Production/Post-production Co-ordinator: Irene Jay
Production Assistants: Patrizia Massa, Marco Spoletini, Mauro Morigi, Amparo Calamai
Production Secretaries: Sabrina Angelucci, Elizabetta Tacconi
Production Administration: Kate Wilson
London Production Liaison: Julia Duff
Assistant Director: Fabio Jephcott
Script Supervisor: Anita Borgioti
Rome Casting: Rita Forzano
New York Casting: Ellen Lewis
Los Angeles Casting: Vickie Thomas
London Casting: Simone Reynolds
Screenplay: Peter Greenaway
Director of Photography: Sacha Vierny
Additional Photography: Lee International Studios
Rostrum Photography and Titles: Frameline
Camera Operator: Agnès Goddard
Focus Puller: Fernando Campiotti
Clapper: Vincenzo Carpineta
Camera Assistant: Steve Parker
Chief Grip: Alberta Moneta
Grips: Phil Jones, Terry Chapman
Chief Electrician: Italo Di Stefano
Flavia's Photographs: Steve Pyke
Stills Photography: Sergio Strizzi, Ermanno Serto
Editor: John Wilson
1st Assistant Editor: Milfid Ellis
2nd Assistant Editor: Alberto Mancini
Assistant Designers: Alessandro Busiri Vici, Eduardo Di Irorio
Art Director: Luciana Vedovelli
Set Dresser: Giorgio Desideri
Properties: Eddie McMahon, Mauro Vitturini
Assistant Props: Roberto Giacomelli
Costume Designer: Maurizio Millenotti
Wardrobe Mistress: Anne Brault
Seamstress: Clara Fratarcangeli
Chief Make-up: Franco Corridoni
Assistant Make-Up: Luigi Rocchetti

Hair: Alberta Guiliani
Music: Wim Mertens
Additional Music: Glenn Branca
Music Performed: London Sinfonietta
The London Sinfonietta Leader: Joan Atherton
The London Sinfonietta Conductor: Paul Daniel
Fiddle Player: Peter Cooper
Music Administration: Duet Music Consultants Ltd
Sound Recording: Peter Glossop
Boom Operator: Gerry Bates
Assistant Boom: Stefano Rossi
Dubbing Mixer: Peter Maxwell
Assistant Dubbing Mixer: Michael Boggis
Sound Editor: Matthew Whiteman
Assistant Sound Editor: Chris Wyatt
Dialogue Editor: Sarah Vickers
Assistant Dialogue Editor: Heather Holden
ADR: Ladbroke Films
Footsteps Artists: Beryl Mortimer, Ted Swanscott
Architecture Consultant: Costantino Dardi
Translator: Flandina Rigamonti
Publicity Consultant: Zakiya & Associates
Unit Publicity: Jennifer Cullen-Smith
[Music] Recorded at: Olympic Studios, Hot Food Studios

Cast

Brian Dennehy (*Stourley Kracklite*)
Chloe Webb (*Louisa Kracklite*)
Lambert Wilson (*Caspasian Speckler*)
Sergio Fantoni (*Io Speckler*)
Stefania Casini (*Flavia Speckler*)
Vanni Corbellini (*Frederico*)
Alfredo Varelli (*Julio*)
Geoffrey Copleston (*Caspetti*)
Francesco Carnelutti (*Pastarri*)
Marino Masè (*Trettorio*)
Marne Maitland (*Battistino*)
Claudio Spadaro (*Mori*)
Rate Furlan (*violinist*)
Julian Jenkins (*old doctor*)
Enrica Maria Scrivano (*mother*)
Riccardo Ussani (*little boy*)
Stefano Gagnani (*the nose man*)
Andrea Prodan (*young doctor*)
Fabio Sartor (*policeman*)

UK/Italy 1987
118 mins

FRAMES OF MIND: THE FILMS OF PETER GREENAWAY

A Zed & Two Noughts

Tue 18 Oct 18:10; Sat 5 Nov 17:40; Sat 12 Nov 17:40; Mon 21 Nov 20:40;
Sun 27 Nov 12:15

Peter Greenaway: Frames of Mind Season Introduction

Wed 19 Oct 18:10

The Belly of an Architect

Wed 19 Oct 20:30; Fri 18 Nov 18:20; Tue 22 Nov 18:10; Sat 26 Nov 15:30

The Falls

Sat 22 Oct 13:50; Sun 6 Nov 14:40

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover

Sun 23 Oct 15:30 (+ intro by Justin Johnson, Lead Programmer); Sat 12
Nov 14:55; Mon 28 Nov 17:50

Drowning by Numbers

Sun 23 Oct 18:00; Sat 19 Nov 14:30; Sun 27 Nov 18:00

Peter Greenaway Shorts Programme 1

Mon 24 Oct 18:10; Thu 10 Nov 20:40

Experimental Sound and Vision: Found Sounds, Lyrical Loops and Landscapes

Thu 27 Oct 18:15; Thu 17 Nov 18:15 (+ intro by author and musician
David Toop)

Prospero's Books

Tue 1 Nov 17:40; Sun 20 Nov 18:00

Peter Greenaway: Pioneer of Cinema

Sat 5 Nov 12:00-17:00

The Unreliable Narrator: Adventures in Storytelling, Documentary and Misinformation

Sun 6 Nov 12:40; Fri 25 Nov 21:00

A TV Dante: Cantos 1-8

Tue 15 Nov 18:20

The Baby of Mâcon

Wed 16 Nov 20:30; Fri 25 Nov 18:00; Mon 28 Nov 20:30

The Pillow Book

Fri 18 Nov 20:30; Thu 24 Nov 20:30; Tue 29 Nov 17:40

8½ Women

Sun 20 Nov 12:50; Wed 30 Nov 20:35

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