



FRAMES OF MIND: THE FILMS OF PETER GREENAWAY

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover

*+ intro by Lead Programmer Justin Johnson and Film Editor John Wilson ACE
(Sunday 23 October only)*

Eating is a constant theme in the films of Alfred Hitchcock. More oddly, as Donald Spoto observed in his biography, lavatories recur to a quite obsessive degree throughout his oeuvre. During his conversations with François Truffaut, Hitchcock, the greatest of cinematic gourmets, spoke of an ambition to make a film that would portray the life of a city through its food. It would show the raw ingredients being transported into the city, their preparation and consumption, and would then conclude in the sewers.

In *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*, Peter Greenaway has come close to fulfilling Hitchcock's ambition. In fact, he has taken it further, portraying the whole of life in terms of consumption and excretion. Greenaway himself has described the film as 'a violent and erotic love-story set in the kitchen and dining-room of a smart restaurant.' But this omits one crucial locale, the restaurant lavatory. In characteristically unflinching style, Greenaway views his subject in its totality. Food is consumed and excreted; some ingredients are lovingly and artfully prepared and cooked, others are allowed to rot.

If *Drowning by Numbers* was a film of the exterior world, shot entirely on location, the new film is a closeted, deliberately studio-bound work, shot entirely in and around one sound stage at Elstree. The film's restaurant is a domain of civilised pleasure, but it is also a Sadean refuge where force rules and everything is permitted: anything can be cooked and there is nothing that cannot be consumed in one way or another.

As in all Greenaway's films, the basic plot is straightforward. Each night the gross, violent villain, Albert Spica (Michael Gambon), comes to dine at the elegant restaurant, La Hollandaise. Permanently in tow are his downtrodden wife Georgina (Helen Mirren) and different members of his gang, played by such actors as Tim Roth and Ian Dury. Albert indulges in what is virtually a monologue, brutal and scatological, in which he insults and abuses all around him. His most delicate, edgy relationship is with the chef of La Hollandaise, played by the French actor Richard Bohringer (most familiar in Britain, perhaps, from *Diva*).

Georgina catches the eye of another of the regular patrons, Michael (Alan Howard), who sits silently reading at his table. They begin a passionate sexual affair which takes place, until the end, entirely within the precincts of the restaurant. This affair consists of virtually nothing but a series of couplings, first in a cubicle of the ladies' lavatory, then in the kitchen and the restaurant's ample storerooms. Finally, on the verge of discovery, they flee naked into the cold-store and escape in a truck full of rotting meat.

The proceedings are dominated, presided over, by Michael Gambon, who unites the film's two sides, part gangster movie, part revenge tragedy. Spica is a spray-cartoon of a gangster. He is like a big psychopathic child, smearing

one of his victims with dog shit in the opening sequence, gleefully outdoing a long line of misogynist gangsters by pushing a fork into the cheek of a girl. He's also a theatrical Jacobean villain, with the gang as his depraved courtiers and the curtained dining room as the stage where he finally receives his desserts.

The other three actors all stand in contrast to Gambon's towering central presence. Where he is coarse, Helen Mirren is painfully vulnerable. Where he is verbose and fluent, Richard Bohringer is restrained, not least by his thick French accent. And where he is loud, Alan Howard, one of the most self-effacing of actors, is virtually silent, speaking his first words halfway through the picture, and then almost in a whisper.

Greenaway is often seen as a director intoxicated with ideas, but his true obsession is the failure of ideas when they run up against the stubborn tyranny of the real world. His idealists are constantly thwarted: by power in *The Draughtsman's Contract*; by physical decay in *A Zed and Two Noughts*; by illness in *The Belly of an Architect*.

As with Greenaway's earlier films, *Cook* features a good deal of nudity, but the naked bodies are viewed in a strangely detached style. For a story about appetite, this is a startlingly unerotic film. Mirren and Howard lie together among the meat and poultry and their bodies come to seem like fleshy constraints, emblems of their possessors' failure to achieve transcendence.

The production design, by Ben van Os and Jan Roelfs (also responsible for *A Zed and Two Noughts* and *Drowning by Numbers*), is magnificent and there are moments in their collaboration with the photographer Sacha Vierny when the film touches greatness. Each area of action, the kitchen, the dining room and the lavatory, has a different design and colour scheme, and the actors' extravagant Jean-Paul Gaultier costumes change colour as they move between them. The different rooms also seem to represent different stages of history, an architectural mockery of human progress. The kitchen with its still lives and its fowl being dismembered is 18th century, the dining room with its lush fabrics 19th century and the hi-tech bathroom late 20th.

Greenaway's last three films, made with the help and boldness of his Dutch producers, are among the most original visual experiments since Powell and Pressburger's great years. With increasing resources and skill, Greenaway has taken old forms – the murder story, the thriller – dismantled them and put them back together to make something entirely new. It's a perilous project and filmgoers must keep their fingers crossed. British visionaries have a way of going terribly wrong. But Greenaway is now beyond question the most exciting intelligence at work in our cinema.

Sean French, *Sight & Sound*, Autumn 1989

THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE & HER LOVER

Director: Peter Greenaway
Production Companies: Allarts Enterprises, Erato Films, Films Inc., Elsevier-Vendex Film Beheer
Producer: Kees Kasander
Co-producers: Denis Wigman, Pascale Dauman, Daniel Toscan Du Plantier
Production Manager: Karin van der Werff
Production Co-ordinator: Nancy D'Ancona
Production Accountants: Cor Severs, Nigel Wood
1st Assistant Director: Gerrit Martijn
2nd Assistant Director: Milfid Ellis
Continuity: Nathalie Vierny
Casting Director: Sharon Howard-Field
Screenplay: Peter Greenaway
Director of Photography: Sacha Vierny
Camera Operator: Arthur Cloquet
Focus Puller: Chris Renson
Editor: John Wilson
1st Assistant Editor: Julian Rodd
2nd Assistant Editor: Birgit Berger
Production Designers: Ben van Os, Jan Roelfs
Art Department Production: Sophie Fiennes
Set Dresser: Constance de Vos
Scenic Artists: Michel de Graaf, Wieger de Jong
Costumes: Jean-Paul Gaultier
Wardrobe Supervisor: Dien van Straalen
Make-up Artist: Sara Meerman
Make-up Effects: Sjoerd Didden
Titles: Platform Design
Music/Music Conductor: Michael Nyman
Music Performed by: Michael Nyman Band
Music Producer: David Cunningham
Violin: Alexander Balanescu, Elizabeth Perry
Violin/Viola: Johnathan Carney
Cello: Tony Hinnigan
Double Bass: Chris Lawrence
Clarinet/Bass Clarinet: David Fuest
Soprano/Alto Sax: John Harle
Alto Sax: David Roach
Tenor/Baritone Sax/Flute: Andrew Findon
Trumpet: Graham Ashton
Trombone: David Stewart
Piano: Michael Nyman, Will Gregory
Cabaret Singer: Flavia Brilli
Guitar: John Perry
Drums: James Hall

Boy Soprano: Paul Chapman
Soprano: Sarah Leonard
London Voices Director: Terry Edwards
Production Sound: Garth Marshall
Boom Operator: Tom Buchanan
Dubbing Mixer: Peter Maxwell
Dubbing Editors: Chris Wyatt, Shirley Shaw, Michael Danks
Sound Effects Treatment: Nigel Heath
ADR Mixer: Aad Wirtz

Cast

Richard Bohringer (*Richard Borst*)
Michael Gambon (*Albert Spica*)
Helen Mirren (*Georgina Spica*)
Alan Howard (*Michael*)
Tim Roth (*Mitchel*)
Ciarán Hinds (*Cory*)
Gary Olsen (*Spangler*)
Ewan Stewart (*Harris*)
Roger Ashton-Griffiths (*Turpin*)
Ron Cook (*Mews*)
Liz Smith (*Grace*)
Emer Gillespie (*Patricia*)
Janet Henfrey (*Alice*)
Breevelt Arnie (*Eden*)
Tony Alleff (*Troy*)
Paul Russell (*Pup*)
Alex Kingston (*Adele*)
Ian Sears (*Phillipe*)
Willie Ross (*Roy*)
Ian Dury (*Terry Fitch*)
Diane Langton (*May Fitch*)
Prudence Oliver (*Corelle Fitch*)
Roger Lloyd Pack (*Geoff*)
Bob Goody (*Starkie*)
Peter Rush (*Melter*)
Pauline Mayer (*fish girl*)
Ben Stoneham (*meat boy*)
Andy Wilson (*1st diner*)
John Mullis (*2nd diner*)
Flavia Brilli (*cabaret singer*)
Brenda Edwards, Sophie Goodchild (*dancers*)
Alex Fraser, Michael Clark, Gary Logan, Tim Geary, Saffron Rainey, Hywel Williams-Ellis, Michael Maguire, Patricia Walters, Sue Maund, Nick Brozovic, Karrie Pagano (*waiters/kitchen staff*)

UK/France 1989
124 mins

FRAMES OF MIND: THE FILMS OF PETER GREENAWAY

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

A Zed & Two Noughts 5 Nov 17:40; Sat 12 Nov 17:40; Mon 21 Nov 20:40; Sun 27 Nov 12:15

The Unreliable Narrator: Adventures in Storytelling, Documentary and Misinformation

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

The Falls Sun 6 Nov 14:40

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover

Sat 12 Nov 14:55; Mon 28 Nov 17:50

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 Belly of an Architect

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

The Pillow Book

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

Drowning by Numbers

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

8½ Women

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

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