



**FRAMES OF MIND: THE FILMS OF PETER GREENAWAY**

# Peter Greenaway

## Shorts Programme 1

Greenaway's innovative shorts provide essential insight into his obsessions and immense talent. *A Walk Through H* introduces us to the character of Tulse Luper, who we meet again in *The Tulse Luper Suitcase* films (playing in December) and features a fine score by Michael Nyman, as does *Making a Splash*, which features Nyman's 'Water Dances' alongside beautifully shot aquatic scenes.

### **Intervals**

Holiday-film shots of Venice – distinguished from authentic amateurism by the calculated flatness of composition and absence of famous monuments – are assembled, reassembled and jump-cut into many and varied permutations. Their only aural accompaniment is provided by what sounds like a 'Teach-Yourself Italian' recording.

This early film, Greenaway's first to gain distribution, provides an easy index to the impulses behind his more mature work. A good clue to the peculiarly resonant relationship between sound and image in all his films can be gained from a final footnote. It simply states, 'Camera '68-69. Dubbing '73'. The holiday-film footage of Venice seems to have been shot without any preconceived notion of a soundtrack, let alone a script. Typically, Greenaway exploits genre conventions – here, the mute holiday-film of the amateur filmmaker.

*Intervals'* use of a 'Teach-Yourself Italian' recording as its only source of sound may, on one level, represent nothing more than the filmmaker's penchant for pastiching structuralist theories on such things as subject-construction in language. More directly, the choice may have been designed to 'ex-pose' the covert intentions behind the vacuous holiday shots, by way neither of explanation nor of opposition but of associative 'correspondence'. Fleeting, there might even be recalled the metaphorical themes of the postcard scene in *Les Carabiniers* or the English lesson in *Bande à Part* (Godard, of course, was a primary influence on the young filmmaker).

The most rewarding aspects of a Greenaway film, presaged clearly by *Intervals*, remain his apparently simple and playful experiments with film's time-space continuum. Remarkably effective here is the straightforward device of jump-cutting a static shot of pedestrians walking laterally across frame while the bubble of language continues uninterrupted on the sound track.

**Robert Brown, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, April 1982**

### **A Walk through H: The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist**

There is no doubt who the British cinema's new folk hero is: Tulse Luper, ornithologist extraordinary, member of the IRR (Institute of Reclamation and Restoration) and apocryphal hero of British filmmaker Peter Greenaway's two most recent films. Greenaway's 42-minute surrealist fantasy featuring Luper,

*A Walk through H*, was shown at last year's London Film Festival and extravagantly praised by many of us; it also jumped straight into two London critics' Top Ten for 1978.

A glance at Greenaway's other films shows that *A Walk through H* is no flash in the pan. The mixture of pedantry and poetry, of method and madness that characterised that mythic journey through a series of brightly coloured maps pervades not only his earlier films (*Intervals*, *Windows*, *Dear Phone*, *H Is for House*) but also his newest work, *Vertical Features Remake*. The last named is another pastiche of bureaucratic delirium: this time an account of the IRR's attempt to collate research material left by Luper after his death and pertaining to the aestheticecological significance of different vertical features (trees, posts, poles, etc.) in the English landscape.

An alumnus of the Walthamstow College of Art, Greenaway graduated first to a career at the Central Office of Information, where he worked directing and editing a series of documentaries designed to purvey the British way of life to foreign TV viewers. Eight years of making films in strict obeisance to propagandist formula took their toll – or possibly produced just the right climate of creative frustration. Certainly a love-hate relationship with institutionalism seems to fuel all or most of Greenaway's work. 'Maps and catalogues and systems fascinate me. They are all attempts to classify chaos. They try to demonstrate that there is an order and an objectivity in the world. What the IRR represents for me is the absurdity of this: it's an organisation that keeps revising the truth while each time pretending that the new version is definitive.'

'My starting idea for *A Walk through H* came when I found a collection of Ordnance Survey maps that had mistakes – roads going left instead of right, orchards painted blue instead of green. Here we are, it seemed, trying to define and circumscribe nature, and it's as if nature were sabotaging or satirising our attempts. In *A Walk Through H* 'real' shots of birds keep interrupting the maps – to break up the artifice. What amazes me in seeing all my recent films in one session' – which, in a preview theatre off Soho Square, we had just done – 'is the overpowering presence of nature, especially the omnipresent, lush English landscape.'

The English landscape is certainly present in his two best films prior to *A Walk through H*: *Windows* (1973) and *H Is for House* (1974). In the first, we glimpse through a series of windows belonging to a house in the rural parish of 'W', gorgeous squares of spring countryside while a voice-off (Greenaway's own) solemnly and hilariously inventories recent deaths by defenestration. Energetic harpsichord music accompanies the film. 'I took it from Rameau's *The Hen*, which I thought had just the right exuberant, manic insistence.'

How much are his films made as absurdist impromptus, deliberately choosing minimal themes around which to spin a web of intellectual or bureaucratic complexity; and how much are they centred on subjects that Greenaway himself cares about? 'I care about the English landscape and about its vulnerability to sloppy or short-sighted 'development. My earliest films, which I wouldn't dream of showing you and which I myself now watch with varying degrees of embarrassment, were very simple, sensuous, pictures of landscape features – sand, snow, sea-set to music: different kinds of music, from a Bach chorale to Brian Eno.'

'What I've tried to do in my films since is make them less simplified than that, less one-layered. Evoke nature by putting its opposite in the foreground –

artifice. Also, my composer on *Vertical Features Remake* and *A Walk through H* was Michael Nyman, and we've worked a lot together trying to evolve a system whereby the music and the visuals are created simultaneously and each has its own independent life. We've made up our own multi-media show – our 'circus', we call it – and we've taken it to a lot of places in England and abroad: showing my paintings, playing his music, screening our films.'

**Nigel Andrews, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1979**

## Making a Splash

Amoral, voyeuristic pleasures come from Greenaway's TV short *Making a Splash*, showing people of all ages and genders 'at home' in water: a bleak, existential vision in which the only 'moral' poles are those labelled 'swimming' and 'drowning'.

**Tony Rayns, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1988**

## Inside Rooms: 26 Bathrooms, London and Oxfordshire

Documentary guide to the art of ablution in a sight-seeing tour of British bathrooms, with people soaking, dozing, eating breakfast and playing with toy boats.

### INTERVALS

*Filmmaker:* Peter Greenaway  
*Production Company:* Peter Greenaway  
*Title Design:* Kenneth Breese

UK 1969  
7 mins

### A WALK THROUGH H: THE REINCARNATION OF AN ORNITHOLOGIST

*A Film by:* Peter Greenaway  
*Production Company:* British Film Institute Production Board  
*Screenplay:* Peter Greenaway \*  
*Camera:* John Rosenberg  
*Rostrum Camera:* Bert Walker  
*Editor:* Peter Greenaway \*  
*Production Designer:* Peter Greenaway \*  
*Maps by:* Peter Greenaway  
*Titles by:* Kenneth Breese  
*Music by:* Michael Nyman  
*Played by:* The Campiello Band  
*Rebec/Violin:* Lucy Skeaping, Roddy Skeaping \*  
*Banjo/Harmonium:* Doug Wootton \*  
*Flute/Recorder etc.:* Keith Thompson \*  
*Trombone/Euphonium:* Steve Saunders \*  
*Clarinet etc.:* Rory Allam \*  
*Piano/Harmonium:* Michael Nyman \*  
*Dubbing Mixer:* Tony Anscombe  
*RSPB Film Library Adviser:* David Layton \*  
*Ornithological Adviser:* Donald Lazenby, Tulse Luper \*  
*With thanks for the co-operation of:* Jean Williams, Donald Lazenby

### Cast

*Narrated by:* Colin Cantlie  
Jean Williams (*receptionist*) \*

UK 1978  
42 mins

\* Uncredited

### MAKING A SPLASH

*Director:* Peter Greenaway  
*Production Company:* Media Software International  
*Producer:* Pat Marshall  
*Music:* Michael Nyman

UK 1984  
25 mins

### INSIDE ROOMS: 26 BATHROOMS, LONDON AND OXFORDSHIRE

*Director:* Peter Greenaway  
*Production Company:* Artifax Productions  
*Producer:* Sophie Balhetchet  
*Music:* Michael Nyman  
*Transmission Company:* Channel Four

UK 1985  
26 mins

Total running time 100min

Shorts Programme 2 will follow in December

### 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

Sat 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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