

archithese

Internationale Zeitschrift und Schriftenreihe für Architektur
International thematic review for architecture

4.2010

Eine kurze Geschichte der Szenografie
Szenografie – Eingrenzung und Aufweitung eines Begriffs
Szenografie im urbanen Raum
Bühnenbilder und Stagedesigns von Es Devlin
Christoph Schlingensiefel und Francis Kéré
Interview mit Peter Greenaway
Szenogramme – Von Ausstellungen und Vorstellungen
Display und Kontextproduktion – Kuehn Malvezzi
Digitale Realitäten – Realer und virtueller Raum
Szenarien der Macht – Italien unter Berlusconi
Modeinszenierungen von Alexander McQueen
Inszenierte Räume: Bettina Meyer
Fritz Hauser mit Boa Baumann
Graft
Holzer Kobler Architekturen
Tobias Klein

Rem Koolhaas' Theaterexperimente
Architektur auf der Expo Shanghai 2010

Interview Buchner Bründler

Szenografie



FROM FILM TO EXHIBITION

Peter Greenaway in conversation with
Stephan Trüby, Flavia Horat and Dolores Renk

Stephan Trüby: Peter Greenaway, it is almost impossible to frame your work. Most people know you through your films, but you are not a film director – at least not just; you studied art and exhibited your paintings, but you are not a painter – at least not just; you wrote texts for operas, but you are not an opera librettist; you've designed and curated many exhibitions, but you are not an exhibition maker – again and again not just. For me the only term that fits pretty well to your spectrum of intellectual and artistic engagement is "scenographer".

Peter Greenaway: In an English-speaking general cultural context "scenography" tends to pretty much mean theatre design, and only even rarely film design, so would have a more limited sense than you might give it. But for our purposes we could both use the word for notions of invented artistic space.

Evolution and Landscapes

Flavia Horat: Which architects and designers, which scenographers did influence you?

Greenaway: Well, not people, but places. The genius loci. My main influences would not have been architects or scenographers but landscape, the English landscape, and my wishful desire to record it. I was avidly drawing and paint-



1

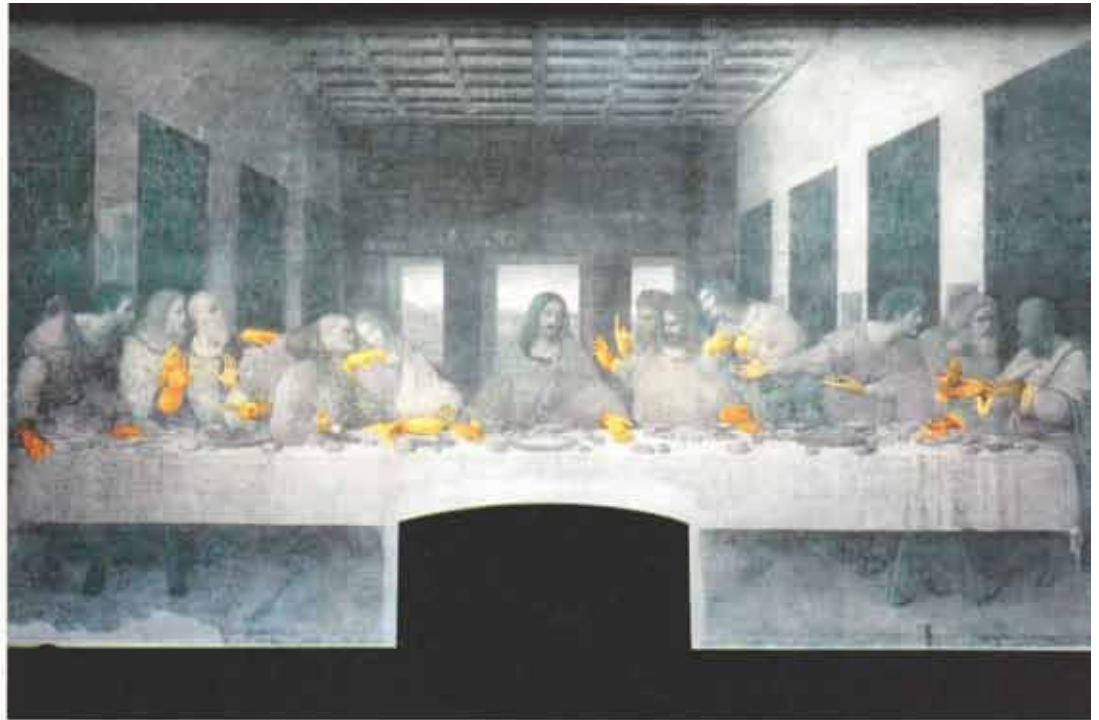


2



3

ing it from early adolescence. It has been said that England has been more drawn, photographed and painted than any other landscape in the world. And gradually and eventually I became aware of that fact. If I had to put a name to influences – it's the English who created Romanticism – it would have to be the lyrical poets, John Keats, William Wordsworth, Thomas de Quincey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. At the start, it came out of schoolbooks and then journeyed more privately backwards to Shakespeare, Spenser and Donne and then, more autodidactically forwards to Blake, Clare and Hardy. But then the influences tipped another way via all the English naturalists – I spent a great deal of my childhood in the Kensington Natural History Museum – every Saturday, all day, for six years – intense scrutiny of the Natural Sciences by "professional" amateurs – culminating in the greatest of them all, Darwin, the man who put the whole thing together for us all – man, fleas, God, sunsets, Deep Time, sex and barnacles. Darwin undoubtedly is the most important contributor to contemporary thinking – nobody, no scientist, no thinker, no philosopher is more relevant in the trickle-down effect to the everyman in the street than Darwin. Responsible for the total and complete collapse of all human vanity. My public heroes now are the Neo-Darwinists – Weismann, Haldane, Gould, Dawkins,



Horat: At the very beginning – you choose writers, painters and natural scientists as your influences?

Greenaway: My father's family came from a long line of antecedents who had an intense interest and a practical reliance in the natural world. My father was an ornithologist, my grandfather was a rose grower, my great-grandfather was a woodcutter. They came from the landscape of Southeast England north of the Thames, starting from Epping Forest, just East of London. My interest in painting was to somehow record this landscape, largely flat and marshy, isolated and somewhat under-developed – the landscape of Constable and Chrome and Cotman. Certainly in paintings. And you will see this interest in all the early short films – titles like *Vertical Features Remake*, *Wrackets*, *Erosion*, *A Walk Through H*, *Windows*, *H is for House* – the titles say a lot – myriad observations of landscape manoeuvred through all sorts of “documentary” dramas. I am thankfully coming back now to all that sort of exposition – the fictional feature film as essay. There were a whole series of people I quietly admired who were busily recording landscape – Bonnington, Kilvert, Palmer – a great many of them did not have aspirations to make great art. And later there were the obsessive Pre-Raphaelites. For a long time paintings like Hunt's *The Hiredling Shepherd* or Millais's *Ophelia* haunted me – intense examination of plant and insect species down to exact identification of Shakespeare's references, melancholia, sex, unconsummated sex and guilty sex, love denied, love abused, innocence abused, failure, waste, drowning, water, literature and natural history.

Art, Comment and Intuition

Horat: Despite the fact that you seem to distance yourself to a certain extent from philosophy and intellectuality, your work in general seems to be very educated and scholarly. Which role does intuition play in your work?

Greenaway: Valuable philosophical and intellectual pre-occupations will not arise without observation and experience – they are the secondary troops to understanding. The original intuitive excitements are the lodestone. You can prepare yourself indeed to encourage and nurture intuition but intuition is central to the activities of an Einstein and a Descartes as much as to a da Vinci or Cervantes. The inspirational moment is always intuitive – but the richer the preparation the more likely the intuitive moment is likely to be understood for what it is, and the better you can use it.

Dolores Renk: And the intellectualism always comes after the intuitive necessary jumps?

Greenaway: I have a statue of Descartes outside my house in Amsterdam. The inscription has a quote that says “curiosity has to be aroused before much else can happen”. I do have – and always have had – an enormous curiosity about the observable world. Descartes had to leave the oppressive intellectual climate of France to think freely in Holland without dogma, restriction, intellectual phobia.

The Belly of an Architect

Trüby: An architect who has interested you is Étienne-Louis Boullée, whose work played a prominent role in *The Belly of an Architect*. What was so fascinating about Boullée for you?

Greenaway: Beyond the ideal classicism, the hopeless concentration on platonic solids, the ability to think really big without check – I think part of the fascination is that he was an architect who built nothing. He concentrated on utopian architecture on paper. No responsibilities. Today's equivalent would be architecture in Second Life – no gravity. Think of architecture without gravity. Vitruvius suggested the best education in the world was the education of an architect be-

1–3 Peter Greenaway, *Fort Asperen Ark, A Peter Greenaway Flood Warning, Fort Asperen, Geldermalsen, Netherlands 2006* (© Photos 1–7: Peter Greenaway)

4 Peter Greenaway, *Leonardo's Last Supper / Ultima Cena, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan 2008*



cause you have to know about everything both to think and practice, to dream and make real. But in a curious way the necessity to know so much and to practice it all, is debilitating. I went to art school with enormous enthusiasm and a great prolific desire to paint images, but after three years much of that enthusiasm had been frozen out of me. You become so aware what a painter should be, ought to be, what responsibilities were called upon, coupled with rigorous self-analysis and self-criticism, that the joy evaporated and art became something of a duty and not an enabling pleasure. It looked as though it would become only a job and a career and not a life. It took me some five years maybe to come back to painting again. Revive the ability to be intuitive and make intuition the deciding factor. Perhaps developing into a filmmaker was a way to overcome the block – stay with the desire to make the imagery but detour around the formidable obstacles of an excessive educational programme – there again – too much constipated philosophising and intellectual programming pins the butterfly dead to the paper. Boullée set himself free because there never was any intention on his behalf of turning his architectural dreams into reality.

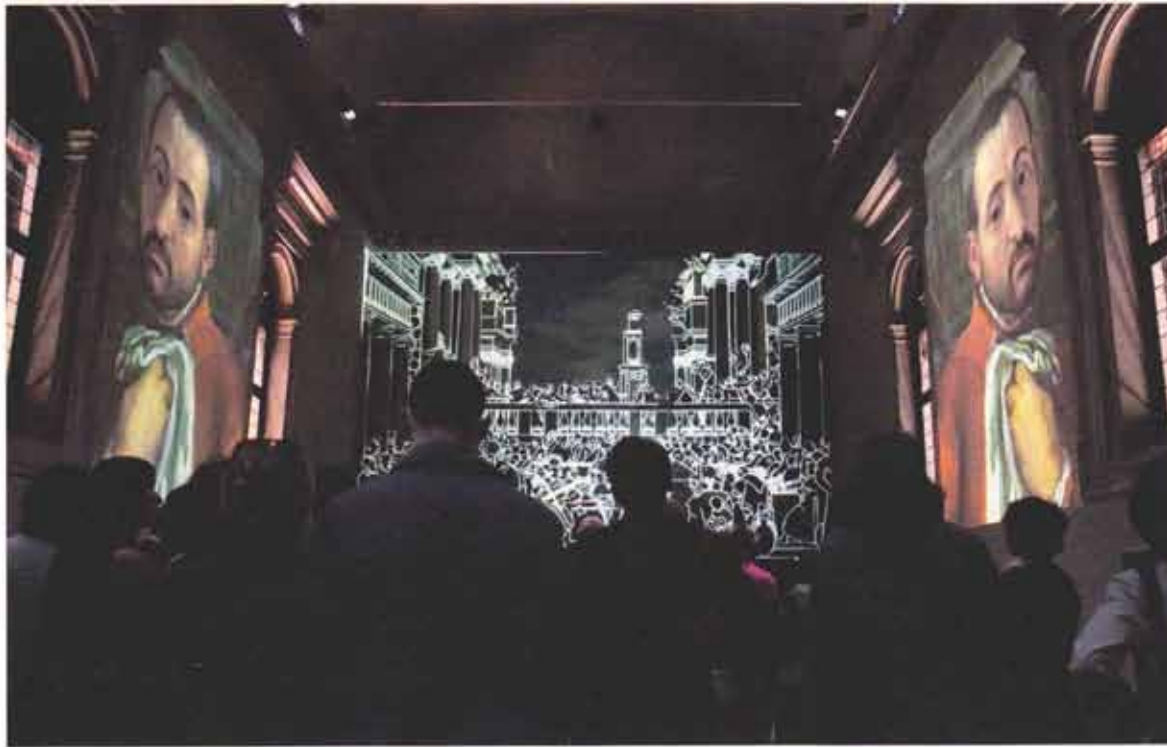
Trüby: Maybe it's a bit forced, but for me *The Belly of an Architect* is a paradigmatic Greenaway film. I have the feeling that there seems to be two dominant genres in your work – there is an early work and a later or recent work in your oeuvre. And *The Belly of an Architect* is almost the turning point. I think your later work can be more or less summarised under the headline "exhibitions" and your early work can be summarised under the headline "film". And *The Belly of an Architect* is a film about an exhibition...

Greenaway: *The Belly of an Architect* was certainly important for me, and in ways I never realised so much at the

time – but maybe you are using your particular disciplines to drive home an idea that should not be over-stressed. It could be argued for example by those with natural history as their metier, that the previous film *A Zed and Two Noughts* was even more important and with that I would have to agree. But anticipating your direction of thoughts, *A Zed and Two Noughts* was about exhibitions – the Zoo as the ultimate exhibition, the ultimate directory of the world's exhibits.

Trüby: I'm wondering about the evolution of your work on exhibitions, Peter. Your later exhibitions, I'm thinking of *In The Dark*, your exhibition work at London's Hayward Gallery (1996) is an exhibition as a film and your work on nine classic paintings like *The Last Supper* (Milan, 2008) or *The Wedding at Cana* (Venice, 2009) is a work that could be entitled "painting as installation art" or "painting as exhibition art".

Greenaway: I cannot disagree with you – but you make it too simple. The very first film I made that was financed by others and brought my activity to public notice was *A Walk Through H*, which minutely examines the paintings in an exhibition and creates the drama from contemplating them – so the theme of film as exhibition and exhibition as film was there from very early on. I am at heart a collector and a collator – a clerk shuffling the index cards, identifying the exhibits, giving them a description for future identification – a would-be encyclopaedist. The two large ponderous Greenaway works – *The Falls* (1982) and *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* (2003–2007) are exhibitions without limit. And how about projects that occupied me in the mid-1990s – a title like *One Hundred Objects to Represent the World*? It became an exhibition in the Vienna Hofburg, catalogues galore and an opera that travelled to Paris, Palermo, Rio and São Paulo.



6 Peter Greenaway,
The Wedding at Cana
 San Giorgio Maggiore
 Venice 2009

Renk: Is your cinema escapist?

Greenaway: When you're watching a Greenaway film you are not looking at any truthful representation of the world. It is not a door or a window into a real world – how could it be? You're only looking at a film. The filmic vocabulary is very artificial, and as often as I can, I make the activity self-reflexive – to keep bringing audiences up with a jolt to realise that they are only watching a film – acting, editing, self-conscious use of music, artificial dialogue, great attention to the artificiality of the frame, frequent break-down of illusion. Use the illusionist possibilities of the cinematic phenomenon and then show them for what they are. This seems to me to be honest. I think cinema is often at its best and at its most fascinating when it acknowledges and explores its artificiality – Méliès if you like, rather than Lumière. Maybe my cinema is only as "escapist" as an exhibition can be "escapist". And my exhibitions like *Flying Over Water* in Barcelona and Malmö, and *The Tulse Luper Suitcase* exhibition in England, Belgium and São Paulo, and the *In the Dark* exhibition about cinema at the Hayward in London are all deliberately very heavily sign-posted with numbering and cataloguing, excessive alphabetical ordering and colour-coding.

However, the fascinations time and time again are the universal ones of sex and death, eros and thanatos, the very start and the very end, the non-negotiables. Cinema seems indeed to create most of its scenarios from one or the other and in most contemporary dominant cinematic genres – it is important to include both.

Horat: Sex and death. You are planning a porno project, but I suppose your porn film is not just a porn film?

Greenaway: It is a historical drama set in the 1590's about the experiences of the Dutch print-maker Goltzius attempt-

ing to finance a new printing press by offering to stage candid dramas of six Old Testament stories that have erotic content. Most new technologies feature eroticism in their early days – think of Venetian portable oil painting in the 1500s, photography in the 1840's, cinema in the 1900s, the Internet in the 1980's and now Second Life in the 21st century. The mass printing of images manufactured on the printing press is new in 1590. And inevitably it attracts the attention and the wrath of post reformation Christianity – so the major theme of the film is the impossibility of sex and Christianity settling down to easy communication and mutual sympathy.

Renk: Peter, what kind of audience do you expect for this film?

Greenaway: You. I want you to be in the audience.

Horat: And where are we supposed to watch this film?

Greenaway: Where? Well, European Film Festivals, then you might see this film in your local art-house cinema though Goltzius will belong to a genre of film and a habit of film-going that is fast disappearing, then DVD, and then maybe on the small screens of your mobile phone. Making cinema for your mobile phone-screen is an exciting challenge. New aspect-ratio frame, very small screen, small-concentration audiences, soundtrack problems, accessibility, downloading, franchising, pay-back retailing, on-the-street censorship, close-ups and no wide-shots, primary colour-coding, high contrasts to see the screen when you stand in the tram-queue under a noon-day sun. It's back to the idea that a cinema education could be the best in the world – you have to know and be aware of so much. But – and this is really a big plus – my friends in Beijing can see my film within hours, if not minutes of me making it. A conventional cinema

big-screen film might take three years to get into a Chinese cinema – if ever.

Games and Post-cinematic Interactivity

Horat: Why are you so disappointed by cinema?

Greenaway: Most cinema is illustration of 19th century novels. Bedtime stories for adults with little attention or desire to use intrinsic cinematic language. Illustration of literature and rarely based on literary models after 1900. It's a deeply unsatisfactory medium. Also a poor narrative medium when you compare it with the power of its literary origins. Cinema is a text-based medium, very rarely an image-based medium. It's had 115 years to experiment but has really moved very little from its beginnings. Spielberg, Tarantino and Scorsese make the same movies as Griffiths – same narrative structures, same psychological pre-occupations, same negative-positive redemption stories based on Judo-Christian dualities and moralities.

I do think there are solutions for its lazy mimetic characteristics but I believe they lie outside the traditional cinema boxes. For the next development stages of a visual/aural event screen-feast spectacle – for which we have everlasting desires since ancient Greece and probably before – and have come through Colosseum-style theatre spectacle, Mediaeval miracle plays and processions and four hundred years of music-lead opera – now we have electricity-powered multimedia events like never before – the next stage must be multimedia consciousness and user-friendly interactivity.

Trüby: Would you agree with the sentence that the 20th century is the century of cinema and the 21st century is the century maybe of computer games?

Greenaway: I seriously doubt both statements. My great-grandchildren will ask, "Cinema? What was that?". Easy proof of that is to consider for one minute the so-called silent-cinema. Millions of films made and seen all over the world from 1895 to 1931. Who watches silent-cinema now?

I could agree to the statement that we are now in the "Age of the Screen". We are probably on screen this minute. They used to say if you have not been photographed you do not exist. Now we can say if you are not on a screen you are truly invisible. Warhol's famous statement is hopelessly out of date. Soon we will all be on screen all the time.

Renk: Are there any exhibition projects or projects in general that you couldn't realise, that belong to the category dream?

Greenaway: We have talked about paper architecture and paper films. There are many paper films – probably ten every week that pass beyond an idle dreaming stage and get noted down on paper or laptop screen – which I know I will never make but wish I could. And I suspect this is not unusual in the world. Multimedia stimulus is ubiquitous. A 14th century villager probably saw only twenty image-representations in a lifetime, my nine-year old daughter easily sees a hundred thousand in one day – cinema itself provides 24

images every second, that's over eighty-six thousand an hour. And I have a propensity to invent very demanding systems that mock human effort. But I am very aware of this megalomania and it's ok.

The Tulse Luper Suitcases project, as a film, is seven hours long. But that only covers 14 out of a predicted 92 episodes. And the project is also 92 DVDs, 92 books, several theatre-plays and many exhibitions, a VJ show with two thousand loops and a proliferating website, that, like encyclopaedias, are without limits, margins and will not have, or even desire, a final resolution.

Horat: Are you criticising that?

Greenaway: Well, I'm sceptical of finishing things. Umberto Eco said that the digital revolution has made a profound change on creativity. Artists traditionally never finish anything – they merely stop work. What did they say of Flaubert? He spent the morning hesitating to put in a comma, and the afternoon hesitating to take it out. And a work of art is never finished. The word-processor of the digital revolution – at least for writers – is such that "effort" is extremely minimised – and the writer finally can finish. No longer does Mrs Tolstoy have to write out *War and Peace* twenty-five times till her fingers bleed.

And psychologically there is a satisfaction in the unfinished work. Michelangelo is more fascinating to me than Raphael. Raphael was a consummate finisher. And because of that there is nothing a visitor can add. He's done everything for you while Michelangelo is so loose and so open-ended and in some way so unsatisfactory, he welcomes us all in to finish the item for him. So we can be deeply interactive with Michelangelo and that is not so easy with Raphael. So the notion of finishing could be a bad idea.

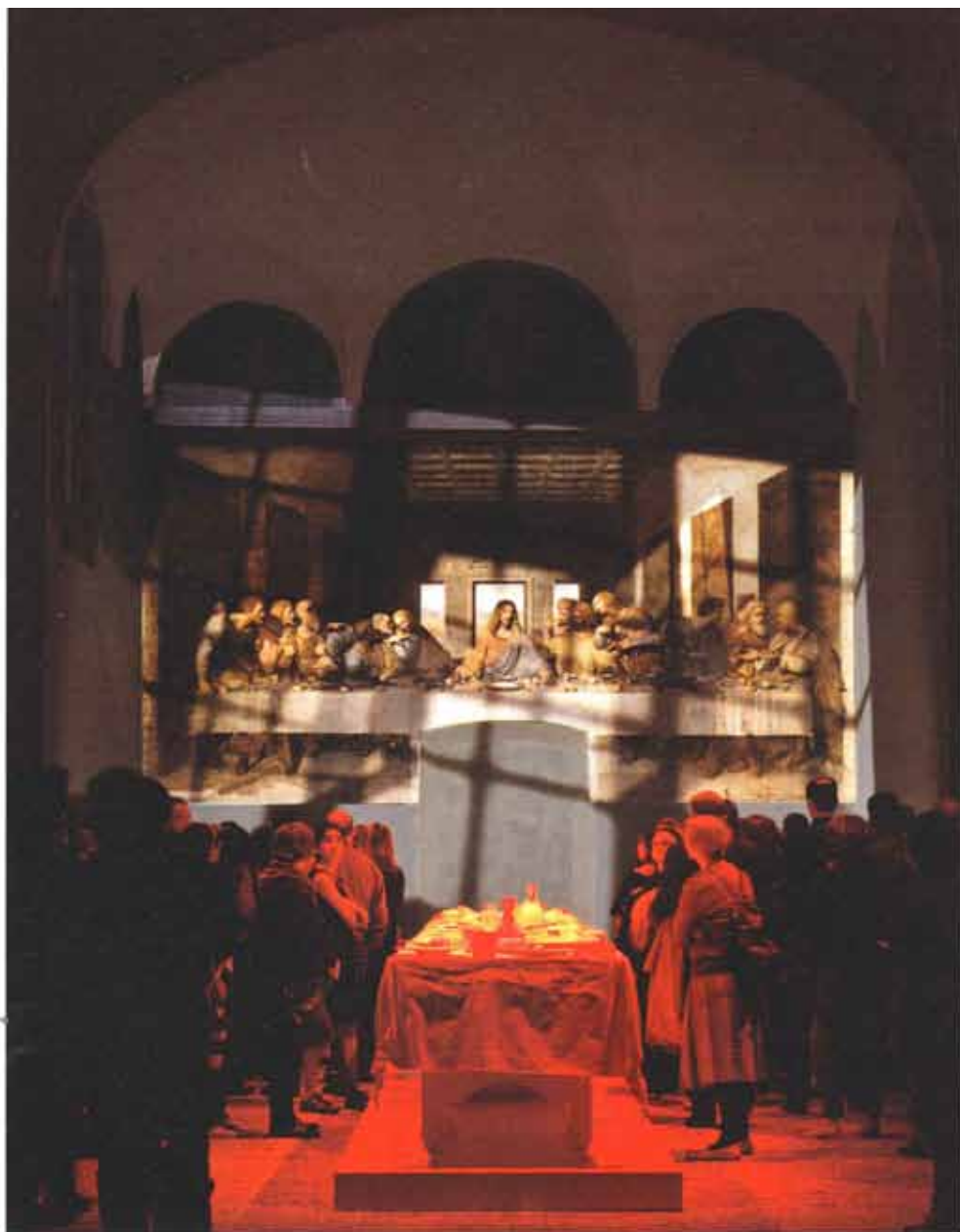
Horat: You are never bored of *Tulse Luper*?

Greenaway: It indeed has a large ambition – a history of the 20th century as regards uranium – the originator and perpetuator of the Cold War and all that follows. I have limited everything to the number 92, the atomic number of uranium and the number of naturally found elements on planet earth. 92 events, 92 characters, 92 suitcases to contain the world's treasures – but there are 92 objects inside each of the 92 suitcases so that is over eight thousand objects to examine and each object is an excuse for a feature film.

Renk: How do you work? Do you have employees or do you have freelance collaborators?

Greenaway: The business of film-making as everybody knows is very multi-talented – actors, lighting crews, art directors, composers and musicians, costume and properties – all are needed – and the people with their talents and experiences responsible for these things are usually very capable of diversifying and using their imaginations on exhibitions, projection shows, museum installations and scenographies of many descriptions. I am trained as a painter, spent ten years learning to become a film editor, I write my own

7 Peter Greenaway,
*Leonardo's Last
Supper / Ultima
Cena*. Santa Maria
delle Grazie,
Milan 2008



scripts – so the visual scenarios, the writing and the editing stay largely in my hands and jurisdiction, but I am not a composer, cannot make costumes, cannot play a musical instrument, cannot build a battleship, have limited knowledge of electronics, only have a command of one language, have small talent for finding money, am impatient with office-work ... And so we have to find the experts – calligraphers, translators, nautical engineers, pilots, engineers, acrobats, etc. I suppose the only areas that remain entirely private for me are painting and “literary” writing – though I cannot make this work without gallery owners and publishers.

Renk: As a scenographer, how do you work with other scenographers?

Greenaway: My major collaborators are the director of photography who has wide and extensive knowledge of all the traditional cinematic vocabularies but exceptional expertise in all the new post-digital arts, and the editors – two of

whom are instrumental in making the dreams fully realisable. As of the last seven years these collaborators have remained in place as essential – and for all else, for the most part although the team is large, responsibilities change.

I would have to confess to being a benevolent despot. Certain things become established. There are no writing responsibilities other than mine. No one brings in dialogue-writers in a Hollywood fashion. Actors cannot change lines unless there are very good reasons indeed. A dramaturge is anathema. The final say on art direction is mine, and I spend long hours behind the camera, and I insist on a director's cut. I listen closely to advice but have no obligations to follow it. The process is not democratic. But the licenses permitted me in the end must be via the consent of others, otherwise all the activity would have collapsed years ago.

Recorded in Zurich on January 8th, 2010.